

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BOGOTA 07723 302305Z

61

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

AID-05 COME-00 EB-07 FRB-03 TRSE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03

CIEP-01 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 IO-13 SAB-01 SCCT-01

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CONFIDENTIAL BOGOTA 7723

EO: 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, ECON, PFOR, PINT, CO, ELAB

SUBJ: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

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1. SUMMARY. THE TEMPO OF POLITICALLY-INSPIRED VIOLENCE INCREASED WITH EMPHASIS ON TERRORIST BOMBINGS AND STREET RIOTING. THE FIRST NATIONAL CITY BANK FINALLY ANNOUNCED THAT IT WOULD COMPLY WITH THE BANK COLOMBIANIZATION LAW. THE LOPEZ, PEREZ, TORRIJOS MEETING PRODUCED COLOMBIAN AND PANAMANIAN SUPPORT FOR THE VENEZUELAN "HARD LINE" IN THE UNESCO COMMUNICATIONS CONFERENCE. CONGRESS CONCENTRATED ON ALLEGED MISUSE OF AUXILIARY FUNDS WHILE NATIONAL SALARY COUNCIL TALKS ON A NEW MINIMUM WAGE BROKE DOWN. THE COMMANDER OF THE NATIONAL POLICE RETIRED AND THE FONOFF UNDER SECRETARY FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS BECAME SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE MINISTRY OF DEVELOPMENT.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BOGOTA 07723 302305Z

2. FNCC DECIDES TO COLOMBIANIZE. THE FIRST NATIONAL CITY BANK

ANNOUNCED THIS WEEK THAT IT WOULD REMAIN IN COLOMBIA AND COMPLY WITH THE BANK COLOMBIANIZATION LAW. FNCB WAS THE ONLY FOREIGN BANK THAT RESISTED THE COLOMBIANIZATION INITIATIVE, CAUSING THE ADMINISTRATION TO SEEK LEGISLATION TO FORCE COMPLIANCE. FNCB CONTINUED TO RESIST TO SELL DOWN EVEN AFTER A COLOMBIANIZATION LAW WAS PASSED, IED CHALLENGED THE CONSTITUTIONALITY OF THE LAW. FNCB INSISTED THROUGHOUT THEIR STRUGGLE THAT IT WOULD LEAVE COLOMBIA RATHER THAN COLOMBIANIZE. THE LAW AS DECLARED CONSTITUTIONAL AND FNCB ANNOUNCED THAT IT WOULD FORM A NEW BANK CALLED CITIBANK, AND SELL DOWN TO 49 PERCENT AS REQUIRED.

3. MEETING OF PRESIDENTS LOPEZ AND PEREZ AND GENERAL TORRIJOS UNEVENTFUL. THE JULY 23 MEETING OF THE LEADERS OF COLOMBIA, VENEZUELA AND PANAMA WAS A HUMDRUM AFFAIR. THE TWO PRESIDENTS, SUPPORTED TORRIJOS ON THE PANAMA CANAL ISSUE, AND AGREED ON MECHANISMS TO WORK OUT BORDER PROBLEMS. IN THE JOINT COMMUNIQUE, LOPEZ AND TORRIJOS GAVE SUPPORT TO BENEZUELA'S POSITION IN A RECENT UNESCO COMMUNICATIONS CONFERENCE, WHICH WAS CONSIDERED "HARD-LINE" BY UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVES WHO WERE PRESENT. COLOMBIA'S POSITION IN THAT CONFERENCE WAS CONSIDERED MODERATE (BOGOTA 7708).

4. POLITICAL VIOLENCE INCREASES. THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASE IN POLITICALLY-INSPIRED VIOLENCE, PARTICULARLY BOMBINGS, IN SEVERAL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY. SIX PERSONS WERE INJURED 24 JULY BY A BOMB AT THE CHILE PAVILION IN THE BOGOTA TRADE FAIR. OTHER BOMBS EXPLODED AT THE U.S. AND WEST GERMAN PAVILIONS BUT CAUSED NO INJURIES. THE MAOIST GUERRILLA GROUP, EPL, CLAIMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THESE BOMBINGS AND WARNED THAT "REVOLUTIONARY VIOLENCE" WOULD CONTINUE. IN MEDELLIN ON 29 JULY A WOMAN WAS SERIOUSLY INJURED WHEN A BOMB EXPLODED IN HER HANDS. THE SAME DAY A MEDELLIN BUS WAS DAMAGED BY MOLOTOV COCKTAILS AND, IN POPAYAN, THE HOME OF LIBERAL PARTY SENATOR MOSQUERA CHAUX AND THE LOCAL PARTY HEADQUARTERS WERE DAMAGED BY BOMBS. ON 28 JULY, A BOMB DAMAGED THE CITY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING IN HONDA, TOLIMA. THE SAME DAY, FIVE ARMED MEN STAGED AN UNSUCCESSFUL ATTACK ON AN NEIGHBORHOOD POLICE STATION IN MEDELLIN, PRESUMABLY IN SEARCH OF ARMS. MEANWHILE, THE SOVIET-LINE GUERRILLA ORGANIZATION, FARC, EXECUTED FOUR PEASANTS, THREE OF THEM LIBERAL PARTY ACTIVISTS, NEAR CIMITARRA IN SANTANDER.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BOGOTA 07723 302305Z

5. RIOTING IN BUCARAMANGA. VIOLENT STREET DEMONSTRATIONS IN BUCARAMANGA ON 27-28 JULY, ALLEGEDLY TO PROTEST THE INCREASE IN THE COST OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION, WERE DESCRIBED BY THE PRESS AS THE WORST IN THE CITY'S HISTORY. ONE STUDENT WAS SHOT TO DEATH AND DOZENS OF STUDENTS AND POLICE INJURED IN THE TWO DAYS OF RIOTING.

6. DEBATE ON AUXILIARY FUNDS DOMINATES FIRST WEEK OF CONGRESS.

MUCH OF CONGRESS' ATTENTION DURING ITS FIRST WEEK OF ACTIVITY FOCUSED ON ALLEGED MISUSE OF AUXILIARY FUNDS (PORK BARREL) BY SOME MEMBERS OF THE SENATE AND CHAMBER (BOGOTA 7453). LLERISTA REPRESENTATIVE AUGUSTO ESPINOSA VALDERRPKR OPENED DEBATE CHARGING TWO TURBAYISTAS WITH MISUSING FUNDS, THUS FIXING ATTENTION ON THE POLITICAL RIVALRY BETWEEN FORMER PRESIDENT LLERAS AND AMBASSADOR TO THE U.S. TURBAY RATHER THAN ON THE SUBSTANCE OF THE ISSUE OR THE CHARGES. MEANWHILE, SEVERAL CONGRESSMEN TOLD US THAT WITH THE PRESTIGE OF THE LEGISLATURE AT STAKE AS NEVER BEFORE, IT WAS IMPERATIVE THAT EACH CHAMBER LIFT THE IMMUNITY OF THOSE AGAINST WHOM SUBSTANTIVE CHARGES ARE BROUGHT. THE CONGRESS' RECORD IN THIS REGARD HAS NOT BEEN GOOD. FOR EXAMPLE, THE CHAMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES HAS FOR SEVERAL YEARS FAILED TO ACT ON PETITIONS OF JUDGES TO LIFT THE IMMUNITY OF TWO OF ITS MEMBERS ACCUSED OF MURDER.

7. NATIONAL SALARY COUNCIL DELIBERATIONS BREAK DOWN. GOVERNMENT, LABOR AND BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVES HAVE BEEN DISCUSSING PROPOSALS FOR INCREASING THE MINIMUM WAGE FOR THE LAST SEVERAL WEEKS. NEGOTIATIONS BROKE DOWN JULY 29 AFTER BUSINESS AND LABOR FAILED TO AGREE ON A JOINT POSITION TO PRESENT TO THE GOVERNMENT AND THE GOC, WHICH HAS BEEN PLAYING A PASSIVE ROLE, REFUSED TO GET MORE DIRECTLY INVOLVED. LABOR REPRESENTATIVES TOLD THE EMBASSY THAT THEY WOULD NOT RETURN TO THE NEGOTIATIONS WITHOUT ASSURANCES OF A CONSIDERABLE INCREASE AND SOME MOVEMENT TOWARD THEIR PROPOSAL FOR A UNIFIED MINIMUM WAGE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY TO REPLACE THE CURRENT THREE MINIMUMS. THEY SAID THE GOC CAN UNILATERALLY ESTABLISH THE WAGE. ACCORDING TO GOVERNMENT SOURCES, THE PRINCIPAL PROBLEM DOES NOT INVOLVE ADJUSTING THE MINIMUM, BUT RATHER THE PENSIONS WHICH ARE TIED TO THE MINIMUM. THEY CLAIM THAT THE BUDGET THIS YEAR DOES NOT INCLUDE A PROVISION FOR INCREASED PENSIONS.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 BOGOTA 07723 302305Z

8. CHANGES IN KEY GOC POSTS. THE COMMANDER OF THE NATIONAL POLICE, GENERAL HENRY GARCIA BOHORQUEZ, WILL RETIRE ON AUGUST 1 AFTER 32 YEARS OF SERVICE. HE WAS EXPECTED TO LEAVE THE FORCE LAST APRIL OR MAY BUT PROBABLY REMAINED IN HIS POSITION A LITTLE LONGER TO AVOID SUBSTANTIATING ACCUSATIONS THAT HE WAS INVOLVED IN A FINANCIAL SCANDAL THAT ERUPTED IN MID-APRIL (BOGOTA 4300). GARCIA'S REPLACEMENT HAS NOT YET BEEN NAMED BUT IT IS WIDELY SPECULATED TO BE THE CURRENT INSPECTOR GENERAL OF THE POLICE, GENERAL VALDERRAMA.

9. UNDER SECRETARY FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS OF THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, ROBERTO SOTO, LEFT HIS POST TO BECOME SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. REPLACING SOTO AT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY WILL BE MRS. TERESA DE ZEA WHO, UNTIL RECENTLY, WAS A MEMBER OF COLOMBIA'S UN MISSION. END LIMITED OFFICIAL USE.

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EARLY IN THE YEAR USUN DESCRIBED HERE AS A "DESTRUCTIVE FORCE"
(STATE 028432) WHO LOBBIED AMONG OTHER LATINS AND RADICAL LDC'S
FOR ILL-FOUNDED PROPOSALS AT THE 30TH UNGA. END CONFIDENTIAL.

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